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## FACT SHEET

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### Court Interpreters

Courts are mandated to provide specially trained interpreters for witnesses, victims, and defendants who understand little or no English. Court interpreters interpret during legal proceedings in court and out-of-court legal proceedings. The cost of court interpreters in criminal proceedings is funded by the state.

#### History

Effective January 1, 1993, the Judicial Council assumed responsibility for certifying and registering court interpreters and for developing a comprehensive program to ensure an available, competent pool of qualified interpreters. (Sen. Bill 1304; Stats. 1992, ch. 770.) In 1994 then-Chief Justice Malcolm M. Lucas appointed the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel to help the council implement the program. Senate Bill 1304 requires the council to:

- Designate the languages for which certification programs will be established;
- Approve one or more entities to certify Spanish-language interpreters and interpreters of as many other languages as the council designates;
- Adopt and publish guidelines, standards, and procedures to determine which certification entities will be approved;
- Adopt standards and requirements for interpreter proficiency, continuing education, certification renewal, discipline, and professional conduct;
- Adopt programs for recruitment, training, continuing education, and evaluation to ensure that adequate numbers of interpreters are available and that they interpret competently; and
- Set fees or establish fee guidelines for applications to take the interpreter examination, for certification or renewal of certification, and for certain other functions.

In addition, the Judicial Council maintains updated lists of certified and registered interpreters for the courts. The *Master List of Certified Court Interpreters of Designated Languages and Registered Interpreters of Nondesignated Languages* is available at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters/master.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters/master.htm).

### Languages

Currently, court interpreters can be certified in 13 languages: Arabic, Eastern Armenian, Western Armenian, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and American Sign Language. Certifications may change periodically, depending on the results of studies of language use in the courts.

### Certified Court Interpreters

Only interpreters who pass the Court Interpreter Certification Examination and register with the Judicial Council are referred to as “certified court interpreters.” The Administrative Office of the Courts has contracted with Cooperative Personnel—Human Resources Services to administer certification examinations.

The certification examination consists of written and oral components. In the written portion, candidates are tested on their knowledge of both English and the target language in the areas of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and grammar. If they pass the written component, they go on to the oral component, which tests their skills in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and in sight translation. Sight translation differs from written translation, in that sight translation is the oral translation of a written document.

Written translation differs from interpretation as well. Translation is the general process of converting the written message from one language to another while maintaining equal language equivalency.

After passing the certification examination, a court interpreter must submit an application to register with the Judicial Council. To maintain certification during each compliance period, the interpreter must submit proof of 30 hours of continuing education and 40 recent court interpreting assignments, as well as attend a Code of Ethics workshop.

The Judicial Council also has the authority under California Evidence Code section 754(f) to designate testing entities for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. The council has determined that a qualified ASL interpreter is one who holds a "Specialist Certificate: Legal" issued by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or a "Legal Interpreting Certificate" issued by the California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCASDHH).

### Registered Interpreters

Interpreters of spoken languages for which there is no state certifying examination are called “registered interpreters of nondesignated languages.” They must pass the oral

and written components of an English proficiency examination. The written component covers vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. The oral component tests English oral fluency.

After passing the English proficiency examination, an interpreter must submit an application to register with the Judicial Council. To maintain registration during each compliance period, the interpreter must attend an orientation and an ethics workshop and must meet the renewal requirements developed for certified court interpreters.

Information about becoming a court interpreter or a continuing education provider is available at 866-310-0689 (a toll-free, 24-hour number) and at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters/faq1.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters/faq1.htm).

#### Per Diem Rates

Legislation effective on January 1, 1998, made the Judicial Council responsible for setting statewide pay rates for interpreter services in criminal proceedings. Previously, each trial court had authority to establish per diem rates; as a result, interpreting rates varied among counties from \$114 to \$210 per full day. Effective July 1, 2000, the council increased the daily compensation for certified and registered court interpreters to \$265 per day across the state—the third increase since January 1999.

#### Multilingual California

According to the 1994 Judicial Council publication *Justice in the Balance—2020: Report of the Commission on the Future of the California Courts*:<sup>1</sup>

- The U.S. Census Bureau in 1990 counted 224 languages and many dialects in California—the most linguistically diverse state in the nation. In San Francisco, more than 60 languages were being spoken in the public schools.
- Of the 32 percent of Californians who spoke a language other than English, nearly one in 10 spoke no English.
- Nearly 5.5 million Californians spoke Spanish; more than 650,000 of these spoke no English.

#### Contact:

Court Interpreters Program, 415-865-7599

#### Additional resources:

Reports and publications, [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4\\_19interp.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_19interp.htm)

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<sup>1</sup> Citing John Dombink and James Meeker, “Access to the Civil Courts for Those of Low and Moderate Means” (July 1993) 66 So. Cal. L. Rev. 2217; John Flinn, “Californians Talk the Most Tongues of All,” *San Francisco Examiner* (April 28, 1993) p. A-1.